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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Wednesday, March 20, 1940

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "FINISHES FOR SUMMER FABRICS." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, United States Department of Agriculture.

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You need to know finishes as well as fabrics when you buy clothes nowadays. When you go to buy yard goods or readymade garments, the salesgirl is likely to talk about "permanent finish," or "crease resistance," or some other such term.

Instead of saying, "What's this?" or "How's that again?" you want to know exactly what she means. To buy wisely you need to know what these new finishes are, and what you can expect of fabrics finished this way.

Women have always wanted summer cotton or linen dresses that are crisp. A crisp dress looks fresh and cool in hot weather. But up until recently the only way to have clothes crisp was to starch them every laundry day. Then the textile manufacturers began trying to find some way to finish cloth with stiffness that will last. For years now they have been trying to find a finish that will keep fabric crisp through both washing and wear, yet will not change the appearance of the fabric.

In the fabrics on sale today you will find several kinds of permanent stiffening. The new crisp finish on a very sheer fabric like voile or organdy often comes from treating with a chemical that takes off the fuzz and leaves the cloth smooth and rather stiff like parchment. The permanent stiffness on heavier fabrics like muslin and lawn may come from various coatings, or from binders that hold the stiffening in the fibers of the cloth. Still another kind of stiffness now in use in men's soft collars and stiff bosoms for dress shirts comes from fusing layers of cloth together into a compound fabric. This makes the fabric soft but pliable. The fabric becomes limp when wet but it grows stiff again if you iron it when wet.

These different treatments for permanent stiffness give cloth a smooth, lustrous, crisp, linenlike texture and appearance. Manufacturers say these finishes have other good qualities. They say the cloth doesn't soil so easily; doesn't turn yellow with age; and doesn't shrink so much. Certainly these finishes are a step in advance of old-fashioned weekly starching. But whether they are truly permanent.....whether the stiffness will remain as long as the fabric is a question.

All the year round, but especially in summer, wrinkles are the big clothing problem. If only clothes wouldn't muss with wear! If only they would stay pressed! If only you didn't have to spend so many hours in summertime over the ironing board ironing out wrinkles! To meet the wrinkle problem manufacturers are now putting out a great many fabrics called crease-resistant. You notice nobody talks about wrinkle-proof fabrics anymore. Manufacturers don't guarantee these finishes to make cloth proof against all wrinkles. But they do say the finishes are a help against wrinkles and save much pressing. Many of the finishes are the result of treating cloth with a resin mixture. That prevents it from taking a sharp crease. When crushed the treated cloth springs back into place.

Some of the worst wrinklers among the fabrics have been linen, spun rayon, and some cotton. These were some of the first fabrics to get crease resistant finishes. By the way, these finishes not only help against wrinkles, but often make the cloth stronger, firmer, and more durable. They also shrink the fabric.

But with all their good points crease resistant treatments are still not perfect. Not all fabrics take the finish the same way. Some treated cloth resists wrinkles very well and some not so well. Before you pay extra for a wrinkle-resistant cloth, make a little test. Crumple a handful of the fabric in your hand; then release it. If the cloth tends to spring back to its original shape, it probably will not wrinkle much. But if it holds hard creases, you'll spend a lot of time ironing it.

Manufacturers do not guarantee crease-resistant finishes to last as long as the fabric lasts even with the best of care. However, these finishes should stand several dry cleanings or washings if properly done. If you wash a crease-resistant fabric, be sure to use lukewarm water and mild soap, and to handle the fabric gently. Hot water, strong soap, rubbing or scrubbing weakens the finish.

With April showers just around the corner and raincoats in season, you may be interested in the new water-proofing finishes. Beg pardon. My error. Textile experts don't use that word water-proofing either. They prefer to say water-repellent finishes, for many of the new treatments help fabric turn off moisture but do not make it proof against water. These new finishes can be used on any kind of fabric without changing its appearance. They make the fabric resist rain and fog as well as perspiration and spilled liquids. Some of these new finishes will even stand up under several launderings so you can have a washable raincoat if you like. Of course, manufacturers are still using some of the older water-proofing finishes. You can still have your raincoat of oiled silk if you prefer.

Most of the new finishes for fabrics aren't perfected yet. Manufacturers are still working to improve them. But they are going in the right direction. They're all aimed to make fabrics suit their purpose better and to save labor in caring for them.

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